

Message Text

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 6288

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE
SUBJECT: KHADDAM DISCUSSES LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

1. SUMMARY: KHADDAM CLAIMS THERE NO PRIOR AGREEMENT ON AGENDA FOR SEPT 17 CHTAURA CONFERENCE. HE DOWNPLAYS SIGNIFICANCE OF EGYPTIAN DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS RE LEBANON. SYRIA HAD NO PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF FRANGIE'S PLANS FOR CABINET CHANGES. FONMIN BELIEVES "MODERATE" WING OF FATAH MAY BE BECOMING INCREASINGLY PRO-SYRIAN BUT CAUTIONS WE SHOULD NOT EXAGGERATE ITS INFLUENCE IN FATAH. ALSO DOUBTS THERE MUCH SIGNIFICANCE IN LT. AL-KHATIB'S PLEDGE TO DISSOLVE THE LAA. END SUMMARY.

2. CHTAURA CONFERENCE: AFTER DISCUSSION OF OTHER SUBJECTS IN OUR SEPTEMBER 17 MEETING, ASKED KHADDAM ABOUT ACCURACY OF MEDIA COMMENT THAT AT TODAY'S CHTAURA CONFERENCE SYRIA WAS AIMING AT A GENERAL CEASE-FIRE IN LEBANON PRIOR TO THE SARKIS INAUGURATION AS WELL AS IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO AGREEMENT AND CERTAIN TROOP WITHDRAWALS. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT NO AGENDA HAD BEEN SET FOR THE MEETING WHICH HAD BEEN THE IDEA OF ARAB

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LEAGUE REPRESENTATIVE AL-KHOULI. SARKIS, ARAFAT AND SYRIA HAD

AGREED TO MEET BUT HE DID NOT WISH TO EXAGGERATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEETING IN ORDER TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT OVER ITS POSSIBLY MEAGER RESULTS. TODAY'S CONFERENCE MIGHT TURN OUT TO BE JUST A FURTHER EXCHANGE OF PROPAGANDA, ALTHOUGH SYRIA FOR ITS PART WOULD TRY TO ACHIEVE POSITIVE RESULTS WHICH WILL HELP RESTORE SECURITY AND STABILITY TO LEBANON. ASKED IF RUMORS ABOUT A PROSPECTIVE ASAD-ARAFAT MEETING HAD ANY VALIDITY, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT THE QUESTION HAD NOT YET COME UP BUT WAS A POSSIBLE TOPIC FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION.

3. CAIRO MEDIATION: KHADDAM DOWNPLAYED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RECENT PROCESSION OF LEBANESE POLITICAL LEADERS TO CAIRO. AS FAR AS DAMASCUS IS CONCERNED, THESE VISITS ARE MOSTLY FOR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES. THE REAL FIGHTERS IN LEBANON ARE NOT GOING. HOWEVER, HE SHRUGGED, SYRIA IS IN FAVOR OF ANY-ONE WHO IS EVEN TALKING OF ADVANCING THE PEACE PROCESS.

4. KHADDAM THEN ASKED WHAT I THOUGHT OF THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON. REPLIED THAT FOR ONE THING I HAD FOUND IT HARD TO UNDERSTAND THE REASONS FOR FRANGIE'S LATEST CABINET CHANGES. FONMIN COMMENTED THAT SYRIA HAD NO ADVANCE WARNING OF FRANGIE'S DECISIONS BUT DEDUCED TWO LIKELY SETS OF REASONS FOR HIS ACTION. FIRST, IT REFLECTED FRANGIE'S PERSONAL DISLIKE OF KARAMI AND HIS DESIRE TO FORCE HIM OUT OF OFFICE BEFORE HIMSELF STEPPING DOWN. KARAMI WAS FRANGIE'S PRINCIPAL TARGET BUT SYRIA KNEW THAT FRANGIE ENTERTAINED SIMILARLY HOSTILE SENTIMENTS TOWARDS GENERAL HANN SAID. STRIPPING KARAMI OF THE DEFENSE PORTFOLIO WAS A PRELIMINARY TO FORCING GENERAL SAID OUT OF HIS POSITION AS ARMY COMMANDER. SECONDLY, SYRIA BELIEVES FRANGIE HAD SOME FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN MIND. LEBANON'S CENTRAL BANK IS LOCATED IN WEST BEIRUT AND FOR "SEVERAL MONTHS PAST" NO SALARIES HAD BEEN PAID TO THE CIVIL SERVANTS IN EAST BEITU. BY TAKING MINISTRY OF FINANCE OUT OF KARAMI'S HANDS FRANGIE SOUGHT TO GAIN CONTROL OF LEBANON'S CENTRAL BANK FUNDS AND USE THESE TO GET LOANS FROM BANKS OUTSIDE OF THE MIDDLE EAST, PRESUMABLY IN EUROPE.

4. FATAH: ASKED IF WE HAD ANY FURTHER NEWS ON LEBANON, I RECALLED
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MY COMMENT TO HIM TWO WEEKS AGO (DAMASCUS 5742) THAT THERE THEN SEEMED TO BE SOME PRO-SYRIAN THINKING DEVELOPING IN THE SO-CALLED "MODERATE WING" OF FATAH. WE HAD HEARD FURTHER SUCH REPORTS. KHADDAM SAID THAT SINCE OUR LAST MEETING HE TOO HAD NOTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF THIS TREND. IT WAS TENDENCY WHICH SYRIA WAS TRYING TO ENCOURAGE BUT, FONMIN ADDED CAUTIOUSLY, FATAH'S MODERATE WING IS NOT IN POSITION TO EXERCISE SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE OVER THE MOVEMENT AS A

WHOLE.

5. LEBANESE ARAB ARMY: WE BRIEFLY DISCUSSED THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY LT. A L-KHATIB THAT HE WAS PREPARED TO DISSOLVE THE LAA EFFECTIVE SEPT 23 AS AN EARNEST OF HIS SUPPORT FOR SARKIS. HERE AGAIN KHADDAM REACTED WITH CAUTION, SAYING THE NEWS INDICATED A FURTHER ELEMENT APPRECIATED THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING SARKIS. BUT IN THE OVERALL BALANCE, ELEMENTS SUCH AS AL-KHATIB LACKED MAJOR INFLUENCE WHEN WEIGHED AGAINST "OTHER FORCES WHICH ARE DEDICATED AND ACTIVE IN ENCOURAGING THE CONTINUATION OF ANARCHY IN THE COUNTRY."

6. COMMENT: FONMIN WAS MORE SPECIFIC THAN IS HIS WONT IN DISCUSSING LEBANESE AFFAIRS. HIS RELUCTANCE TO PREDICT AN IMMINENT BREAKTHROUGH IN LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS REFLECTS HIS CAUTION ENGENDERED BY SO MANY MONTHS OF DISAPPOINTMENT OVER SYRIAN DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY INITIATIVES. SYRIA'S REPRESENTATION AT CHTAURA BY DEPDEFMIN NAJI JAMIL INSTEAD OF BY PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI, WHOSE PLANNED ATTENDANCE HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED IN BEIRUT, ALSO SUGGESTS DAMASCUS IS SEEKING TO DOWNPLAY CHTAURA'S SIGNIFICANCE. (IN FACT JAMIL IS PROBABLY BETTER BRIEFED FOR THIS TASK THAN KHULAYFAWI AND ALSO ENJOYS ASAD'S FULL CONFIDENCE.) BELIEVE KHADDAM'S DOUR COMMENTS ABOUT CAIRO'S MEDIATION EFFORTS (PARA 3 ACCURATELY REFLECT THE AMBIVALENCE ASAD HIMSELF PRESENTLY FEELS TOWARDS EGYPTIAN DIPLOMACY. (THIS IS BEST ANSWER WE CAN PRESENTLY GIVE TO EMBASSY CAIRO'S QUESTION WHETHER ASAD IS SO DETERMINED TO END THE FIGHTING THAT HE WILLING TO PERMIT GOE TO PARTICIPATE IN SETTLEMENT. (CAIRO 12468).
MURPHY

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